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A NEGLECTED CHAPTER IN THE LIFE OF COMTE.

The writings of Comte, even since their appearance, have tended to become separated into two distinct groups, upheld by two equally distinct classes of followers. Those who were impressed by the magnitude of the "*Cours de philosophie positive*," and who were not in accord with the thought of the time, hailed its author as a new star of the first magnitude, surpassing in brilliancy such lesser lights as Descartes and Leibnitz and Bacon. For a dozen years this new star kept its place with them, and then it began to grow dim. The publication of the "*Système de politique positive*" lost Comte the greater part of his former followers; and those among them who did not forget his previous work, have quietly ignored the whole body of his later writings, or, if mentioning them at all, have dismissed them as the product of a great mind gone wrong. Another class of followers have stood steadfast. They have discovered in the author of the "*Système de politique positive*" a new apostle, the teacher of a new rule of life, and the founder of a new religion. In their interpretation of Comte they have dwelt almost wholly upon his later work. A few hardy disciples have tried to harmonize this with the "*Cours de philosophie positive*." Their success has not been flattering. The Comtist philosophy and the Comtist religion have remained, and must remain, contradictory in nature and purpose.

In all the discussion, one important period of Comte's life has been neglected and apparently almost forgotten. The immediate success of his "*Cours de philosophie positive*," published in sections from 1830 to 1842, made him a man of note, and from that time his career is well known. Before then he was an obscure tutor in mathematics, and author of a few essays, which were known to a comparatively limited circle.

After the publication of the first volume of the "*Système de politique positive*," in 1851, so much was said about the contradiction between this and the *Cours*, that in the subsequent volumes Comte reprinted these early essays, for the purpose of showing that his ideas were formed at a date earlier than the publication of the *Cours*. Littré, in his biography of Comte, gathered much material relating to this early period, and Bridges, in his "Unity of Comte's Life and Doctrine," attempted to bring the *Cours* and *Système* into a harmonious whole. Comte himself asserted that these essays proved the unity of his system. He went further than this. He said that the *Système* was the most important work of his life, and that his whole thought, from the very beginning, had been directed toward it. In the preface to the appendix to the *Système*, containing these early essays, he wrote:

"The complete continuity of my thought is disguised by the exceptional magnitude of my task, and obscured by the analytical habits of our day, so unfavorable to any comprehensive judgment. All but those who grasp the necessary connection between the philosophic basis and the religious superstructure must regard the two portions of my career as divergent. The fact, therefore, that my second life simply realized the aim which I proposed to myself in early life requires to be made clear. This the present appendix is calculated to do. . . . It will demonstrate the inconsistency of all who, adopting the positive philosophy, reject those social applications which I announced from the outset. . . . The political system, far from being opposed to my philosophy, is so completely its outcome, that the latter was created as the basis of the former, and of this the proof is supplied by the present appendix."

After such statements as these on the part of Comte himself, it is surprising to see how little attention has been paid to this part of his work. Ward, in his "Dynamic Sociology," devoted a chapter to Comte, as being the founder of the science; yet in that chapter there is not a reference to any of Comte's writings except the *Cours*, nor even a mention of any of his social schemes. So at the present time, in

Waentig's book on "*Comte und seine Bedeutung für die Socialwissenschaft*," the *Système* comes in for a few words of disapproval, and is then dismissed as entirely at variance with the positive philosophy,—something that should be forgotten as soon as possible. The early essays are included in the bibliography, and receive a passing mention in the text; but there is nothing to show that they entered at all into the author's appreciation of Comte.

If, as he himself stated, this part of his work is so fundamental, it would seem to be a serious omission to neglect it in considering his place in sociology. It is perhaps just, to say that any attempt to show a unity of his doctrine by pointing out similarities between early essays and the *Système* must be futile, because it does not thereby reconcile them with the *Cours*. But it is not just to take the *Cours* as the basis of interpretation, neglecting all else as inconsistent. If it is worth the while to try to explain Comte at all, a more serious study must be made of the first period of his life.

Comte was born in 1798. His childhood was spent under the careful direction of a devout Roman Catholic mother. At the school in his native town of Montpellier, he showed marked ability; and at the age of fifteen, on completing his studies there, he was given a year's appointment as tutor in mathematics. In 1814 he entered the *École Polytechnique* at Paris, and from the very first he distinguished himself as a student of great intellectual power. It is important to remember what kind of instruction was given at the *École Polytechnique* at that time. Mathematics and physics were the dominant sciences. The greater part of the scientific development of the eighteenth century had proceeded along these lines. Back of the rigid conceptions of systematized natural laws which these sciences set forth, there was the empirical philosophy of the time. The philosophy taught at the *École Polytechnique* was that of the *Encyclopédie*. It was in the thought of Diderot and Voltaire, Condorcet and

Hume, that Comte was trained, and the influence of this early training made itself apparent throughout his career.

A year of this influence left him a revolutionary in politics, a skeptic in religion, an empiricist in philosophy. He hated the old régime in France, and all that was connected with it. The Revolution was for him, as for so many others, the beginning of an epoch when the old systems of temporal and spiritual power should be discarded and replaced by a new system based on reason and science. This state of mind was evident soon after the Restoration. With the change in government, a new allegiance was required at the *École Polytechnique*. Several of the students, who were not disposed to yield to the reaction, joined in a protest, and among the most outspoken was Comte. He succeeded in making himself so obnoxious to the authorities that in 1816 he was dismissed.

The next few years added little to his position. A scheme to found a polytechnic school in the United States occupied his thoughts for a time. General Bernard submitted the plan before the American Congress, but could not make it attractive enough to secure an appropriation, and was forced to return to France unsuccessful. Comte then became private secretary to Casimir-Périer, a conservative banker, subsequently the head of the French ministry. Here he found little encouragement in his revolutionary ideas. Judging from his later life, he probably was not therefore backward in expressing them, with the natural result; he sought employment elsewhere. After this he made a modest living by giving private lessons in mathematics.

In 1818 Comte became acquainted with Saint-Simon. Friendship for the man soon grew into sympathy with his thought, and for six years Comte lived on terms of the greatest intimacy with him, and was proud to sign himself "pupil of Saint-Simon." In appreciating this new influence, it is important to remember what sort of man

Saint-Simon was. A considerable originality of conception, a good general knowledge of science, and a fertile imagination were offset by a total lack of constructive power. He made no lasting contribution to science or philosophy; the only part of his thought which he ever attempted to systematize was his scheme of social and religious reorganization. He was a man who suggested much, but completed little. Comte, on the other hand, was nothing if not constructive. His powers of combination greatly outweighed any originality of thought that he may have possessed. In fact, there is little evidence to show that Comte had much originality. He absorbed too readily the ideas of men under whose influence he came. But he had the faculty of co-ordinating fugitive ideas into systematic order.

When Comte became acquainted with Saint-Simon, there is every reason to believe that his opinions on philosophy were pretty well formed. He had accepted the system under which he was trained,—the eighteenth century empiricism. There had been no definite philosophic reaction in France; if there had been, he might have fallen in with it. And Saint-Simon was not the man to change his philosophic thought. But Saint-Simon did represent in a fairly typical way the social and religious reaction which was going on. He was, moreover, just the kind of man to appeal to Comte at this time. A mere return to the old system, such as that voiced by De Bonald and De Maistre, would probably have made no impression on Comte. But Saint-Simon saw that there were good points in the old system, which the Revolution had swept away without putting anything in their place. He was attracted by the admirable order of what he chose to term the "theologic" epoch, and while denying its basis, he attempted to rebuild its superstructure. Comte seems to have entered heartily into the work; and here, at the very outset of his career, is found the contradiction which continued throughout his life. His philosophy was that of the empirical school. His political and social thought was, at

the root, that of Saint-Simon. He attempted to combine the two,—to furnish a basis for reaction out of the system which preceded it. But the two were from the first irreconcilable. Hence the positive philosophy and the positive religion have meant entirely different movements. The philosophy appealed most strongly to the English empiricists,—the *laissez faire* school whose political doctrines were so distasteful to Comte. The religion, or at any rate the polity, found its adherents at the antipodes of the former, among the extreme socialists. Had he lived twenty years earlier, he would have been another Condorcet; twenty years later, another Lassalle.

Littre and others have attempted to show that Comte owed little to Saint-Simon. In fact, they assert that Saint-Simon borrowed from Comte; but everything points the other way. Saint-Simon was nearly sixty years old; Comte was but twenty. Saint-Simon had published, in 1807, the "*Introduction aux travaux scientifiques du XIX^e siècle*," and in 1813 the "*Mémoires sur la science de l'homme*." In these two works it is easy to trace all the essential points on which he based his later work. He looked on the Revolution and saw that it had produced no great changes in the form of government. This led him to an examination of the men and ideas of the time, and he found no definite plan of progress. The eighteenth century philosophy and politics were negative. They existed only to destroy the feudal and ecclesiastical systems which had fastened themselves on society for so many centuries. The Revolution had swept them away, and yet for lack of anything to put in their place, France seemed in a fair way to recall them. Saint-Simon argued from this that there must have been some good in the mediæval system, and this good he attributed to its thorough organization of society. But its basis was wrong. The mediæval state represented the "theologic" epoch in the human mind. Man naturally passed through two stages. In the "epoch of theologism" he was content to explain all

natural phenomena in terms of theology, and to submit to a military form of government. But this epoch was forever past, and society was entering upon a new one, which Saint-Simon called the "epoch of physicism." Here man demanded natural explanations of natural phenomena, and a reorganization of society on an industrial basis. What was first necessary was a new system of positive philosophy, which should include all human knowledge. When from such a system the laws could be deduced for the new epoch of society, a proper start could be made toward the organization of the industrial classes. He thought that the social laws, and in fact the whole system of philosophy, could be deduced from the law of gravitation.

Saint-Simon never carried out this idea. The rest of his life was devoted to industrial propaganda, and to the development of a new Christianity, which was to avoid the defects of the old system and serve as a bond of union for the citizens of the industrial state. He was busied about this when he became acquainted with Comte; and it required but little association to show him that his pupil was better qualified than himself to supply a rational basis for his schemes. In two essays, written in 1819 and 1820, Comte stated Saint-Simon's political thought so clearly and cogently that in 1822 the master entrusted to his pupil the task of preparing a philosophic introduction to his "*Contrat social*."

These first two essays of Comte show clearly enough his complete acceptance of Saint-Simon's thought. The first, "*Séparation générale entre les opinions et les désires*,"* is a short appeal for a positive political science. Neither the people nor their rulers are capable of any general conception of political methods. They can signify their wishes; but the means of attaining them should be shown by the adepts in the new science.

*"System of Positive Polity," Vol. iv, p. 497.

"The public alone should indicate the end. . . . The consideration of the measures affecting it belongs to scientific politicians. It would be absurd for the masses to reason about them. . . . When politics shall have taken the rank of a positive science, the public should and must accord to publicists the same confidence in their department, which it now concedes to astronomers in astronomy."

In the "*Sommaire appréciation de l'ensemble du passé moderne*"* the historic basis of this science is set forth. The reason for such a political reorganization is, that society has passed into a higher stage, and is no longer in harmony with the institutions of the past. The old mediæval system, for centuries passed into decadence, is on the eve of making way for a modern social system. The mediæval epoch was dominated by two powers, the feudal and spiritual. These must be replaced by two others, the industrial and scientific or positive. Science and industry are to replace theology and war; the epoch of theologism is to end in an epoch of positivism. In the eleventh century the mediæval system culminated; at the same time the positive system was born.

"Since that period the two systems have always co-existed in a state of mutual antagonism, at one time secret, at another open; the first, however, always losing ground while the second continually advanced."

Comte then reviews the general course of European history to show how this coincident decay and growth have proceeded. Reaching his own time, he finds that,

"the new system after having obtained the exclusive direction of all the details of society, has, step by step, gained in the ordering of the *ensemble* all that the ancient system has lost. Under temporal aspects the right of the Commons to modify at their pleasure the general political plan has been recognized; and the legal exercise of this right has been regularly constituted, the means of effecting the transition being thus also provided. Under spiritual aspects the scientific capacity has obtained all the influence it can possess over national education until the teaching of morals has passed into its hands. . . . The new system then needs to mount but one step more in order to reach a complete organization and entirely to replace the ancient

* *Ibid.*, p. 499.

system. It only remains for it to complete its temporal and spiritual achievements; in temporal matters by gaining possession of the House of Commons, in spiritual, by establishing morals on principles solely deduced from observation. In truth, all is ready for this step; the means exist, we only require to use them."

In these few extracts are contained the fundamental ideas on which Comte proceeded. In their essence they are the same as those of his friend and master, Saint-Simon. Organization of society on an industrial basis; guidance of the people by a body of savants, whose teaching should be in accordance with a positive science, social, moral and political,—but more important than these, an interpretation of history not such as Comte developed later, but strictly following Saint-Simon's "law of two states." The insertion of a metaphysical state and a consequent "law of three states" came later, probably after a study of Turgot.

This is one of the most interesting of Comte's essays. The style is more concise and effective than in his later works. One passage in particular contains a better statement than is to be found elsewhere of his idea of the organic course of society.*

"The law of human progress dominates all; men are only its instruments. Although this force springs from ourselves, it is no more possible for us to withdraw from its influence or control its action than to change at our pleasure the original impulse which causes our planet to revolve about the sun. . . . All that we can do is consciously to obey this law, which constitutes our true providence, ascertaining the course it marks out for us, instead of being blindly impelled by it. . . . In doing so we should merely employ, with still less departure from the reality, the method adopted in the physical sciences, where intention and design are attributed even to inorganic matter in order to afford a clearer view of the phenomena."

In 1822 Saint-Simon published, for private circulation, his "*Contrat social*," together with a third essay by Comte, the "*Plan des travaux scientifiques nécessaires pour réorganiser la société*." In 1824 he republished his pupil's essay

* *Ibid.*, p. 511.

in his "*Catéchisme des industriels*," this time with a patronizing notice of its shortcomings, and with a new title, "*Système de politique positive*." Comte objected to this title; for although he intended to use it in a work as yet only under contemplation, the present essay was little more than an outline, with a discussion as to the method to be used. This act of Saint-Simon, together with a personal dislike for his followers, led to a quarrel, and Comte separated from his master soon after the publication of his essay.

This "*Plan des travaux*" states plainly what were Comte's aims, and outlines the works necessary for their attainment.

"My aim," he says, "is to show that politics should be made a positive science, and to apply this fundamental principle to the spiritual reorganization of society. . . . Two lines of spiritual work are necessary, of opposite kinds but equally important. The first, which calls into service the scientific capacity, is to reconstruct doctrines in general. The second, which makes use of the literary and artistic capacity, is to renew the social feeling."

Reviewing once more the conditions of his time, he finds society oscillating aimlessly between two equally harmful tendencies. The adoption of a new organic doctrine is all that is needed to bring about the "great work of social reorganization." Politically, this is to take place through the division of labor and the combination of effort, under the direction of the industrial chiefs. And the spiritual power is to be reconstituted by the savants, who are to systematize and teach the new science of politics. They alone possess the two fundamental elements of the spiritual government, capacity and authority in matters of theory. And to show that the time has come for this, Comte makes his first statement of the "law of three states" and the "law of the classification of the sciences." * The human intellect passes through three states: the theological, the metaphysical, and the scientific or positive. The sciences have

* *Ibid.*, pp. 547, 549.

passed through these stages in the order of their simplicity. Mathematics, physics, chemistry, and recently physiology, have become positive theories. A scientific polity must therefore arise. To make this possible, three series of works are necessary, which Comte sums up in a prospectus.*

“The first series aims at forming a system of historical observations upon the general progress of the human intellect destined to become the basis of a positive polity. The second series seeks to establish a complete system of positive education adapted to a regenerated society constituted with a view to action upon nature. The third series embraces a general exposition of the collective action which civilized men, in the present state of their knowledge, can exercise over nature so as to modify it for their own advantage, directing their entire forces to this end and regarding social combinations only as the means of attaining it.”

The remainder of the essay is occupied mainly with a discussion of the basis of the “law of three states,” and the method to be followed by the new social science, together with some interesting criticisms on earlier writers like Montesquieu and Condorcet. The science, Comte says, demands that observation should preponderate over imagination. Its fundamental datum consists in a determination of the real tendency of civilization. It should not attempt to alter this tendency. But it can harmonize political action. By prevision it can avert or mitigate violent crises. It must be based on observation; yet, as its purpose is social reorganization it must be propagated by the aid of imagination. In order to establish a new social system, just conceptions will not suffice. The mass of society must feel attracted by it. The only way to effect this is to present a vivid picture of the ameliorations which the new system should bring about in the condition of mankind, apart from its necessity and opportunity. This alone can impress on society that active devotedness which is demanded by a social state

* *Ibid*, p. 550.

destined to maintain all the human faculties in constant action.

Concerning the share to be taken by the savants in developing this new science of "social physics," Comte wrote two essays which were published in the *Producteur* in 1825 and 1826, "*Considérations philosophiques sur les sciences et les savants*," and "*Considérations sur le pouvoir spirituel*."* In these he repeats much that has gone before. He begins emphatically:

"In order to terminate disorder it is necessary to destroy its source, by bringing society back to a state of unity. This can be accomplished either by restoring to theological philosophy all the influence it has lost, or by completing positive philosophy so as to make it capable of definitely replacing theology. To these simple terms we can now reduce the great social problem."

Comte then brings in his science of social physics and supports it by his "primary laws of the three states and of the hierarchy of the sciences." He shows how it is destined to replace theology. But to reach the efficiency of the old system it must be taught by a spiritual power as absolute as that of Rome. Dogmatic belief is the normal condition of the human intellect. This is especially important when social ideas are to be considered. The mass of mankind is called to action; but scientific faith is the true basis of action, and spiritual guidance is needed for personal and social morality. Hence the chief function of the new spiritual power is education. And education means not merely the preparation of youth, but the regulation of the life of adults. The principles imbibed in youth must be enforced thereafter, when neglected or violated, so far as moral means will bring this about.

Further than this, the spiritual power must fuse all European nations into one moral communion. It must regulate modern industry, as based on the division of labor. And in order to do this, it must influence all international relations.

* *Ibid.*, pp. 590, 618.

“The social state toward which modern nations tend, no less than that of the middle ages, demands a spiritual (that is to say, intellectual and moral) organization, at once European and national.”*

These essays show that, at the age of twenty-four, Comte had already made the plans for his life's work. His ideas were fully formed. He had even gone so far as to write a prospectus of the work he intended to accomplish. And the only way of reaching a proper understanding of his later work is to compare it with these early plans, and to decide how nearly it fulfills them.

The starting-point and the goal of Comte's thought were not philosophical, but practical. From the beginning of his career to the end he was a practical social and religious reformer. The whole problem as stated in the early essays, is one of reorganization. It is true that Comte declared a positive synthesis to be necessary before this took place, and heroically attempted to present one; but all the time the practical end was kept in view. It was with no interest in philosophic discussion that Comte gave his free lectures in Paris. He was not trying to inculcate a new theory; he was carrying out a plan of social reorganization which had been constantly in his mind for thirty-five years. He was perfectly right in saying that his “*Système de politique positive*” was the fulfillment of his earliest plans, and in declaring the *Cours* to be only its forerunner. Both these works were certainly promised in his prospectus of 1822. And yet, when written, they were fundamentally contradictory. It remains, then, to decide how nearly either one actually represents what Comte intended, and whether both may not have missed their mark through their author's inability to carry out his ideas.

Comte's intention was to effect a reorganization of the spiritual power in the hands of the savants. They were to prepare a new synthesis of knowledge, which should supplant the old dogmatic theology. But in spreading their

**Ibid.*, p. 144.

doctrines in order to lay the foundation for a reorganization of society on an industrial basis, they were to remember that the social instinct, not the social intellect, was to be attracted, and that this could only be done in an imaginative way. The spiritual guides of society were to be entrusted with the task of reasoning; it remained for the people to believe and obey. The importance of this idea of the power of social instinct in Comte's thought has not been recognized. In the *Cours* he was not concerned with it, and in the *Système* he utilized it only through his religious machinery. The lack of a proper treatment of this idea is one of the best indications that none of his later work was what he intended it to be.

In 1826 Comte became insane, and it was two years before he recovered his health. An examination of his best-known works, in comparison with his plans before his insanity, gives many reasons for the suspicion that he never quite recovered his mental balance. Who does not remember the contempt displayed in the *Cours* for physicians and medicine? They are repeatedly impugned as unworthy of the confidence of reasoning men. Yet all this prejudice is the result of the medical treatment Comte underwent during his insanity. It was undoubtedly harsh and ill-advised, as Comte's letters to his wife at the time declared; and he made no improvement until his wife took him out of the physician's care. And from this one instance of incompetence the self-declared successor of St. Paul and Aristotle reached the conclusion that all the rest were the same.

In his prospectus of 1822, it will be remembered that Comte promised three series of works: first, an historical basis for a positive science of politics; second, a system of positive education based on this science, but presenting it in an imaginative way; third, an exposition of the principles of collective action by men over nature. The attempted fulfillment of the first promise is found in the *Cours*; of the second, in the *Système*; of the third, nowhere. Yet it is

this third series which would be most necessary to constitute a science of social physics or sociology. And it is certainly not to be found in the *Cours*. The section on social statics does not supply the lack. That on social dynamics is devoted to establishing the historical foundation which Comte promised. He never attempted to study the environment or the human mind, and to deduce therefrom any theory of social progress. He drew a picture of society as he thought it should be, and then twisted out of history an argument that past and present tendencies were toward his ideal. But this was out of place in a work which was intended to supply the basis for the new spiritual power. It would rather have been appropriate in his system of popular education. A science of collective action was imperatively demanded in a work of such pretensions as the *Cours*; but Comte was utterly incapable of founding such a science. The *Cours* must be considered as a remarkably clever synthesis of knowledge which was five or ten years behind the times at the date of publication; added to this is an elaboration of ideas on social reconstruction, gathered from the most widely differing sources, and not so well presented as in the early essays. But as a consistent social science such as Comte planned, it is a total failure. Comte had great power in co-ordinating other men's ideas; but no man was worse fitted than he to give them a philosophic basis. So we are given an instance of a philosophy, which was intended to be a guide to the direction of the social instinct, but was actually developed in such a way as to deny or ignore the social instinct altogether. As a recent writer has well said; "the father of positivism was the least positive of men."*

One might think that a man of such keen perception as John Stuart Mill would have discovered how flimsy was the philosophic veil which Comte drew over his ideas. Yet when Comte announced that Descartes and Leibnitz and Bacon were great, but a greater than they had come, Mill

*Thamin, "*Education et positivisme*," Paris, 1895.

admitted the parallel.* He would probably have done so less readily, had he known that Comte had already signed himself Brutus Bonaparte,† and, even at the time that Mill wrote, was comparing his services to society with those of St. Paul and Aristotle. Mill's whole estimate of Comte was mistaken. He proclaimed him as a great philosopher, and then deplored the decadence of his ability. And to this estimate of Mill's was largely due the spread of Comte's doctrines where they were most influential. What he should have deplored was the attempt to twist out of the empirical philosophy a sanction for social and religious utopias which were foreign to its nature.‡

While Mill did not appreciate the importance of the "*Système de politique positive*," it is not to be supposed that this work is any more in harmony than the *Cours* with Comte's prospectus of 1822. Comte was right in saying that a book covering this ground was what he had promised, but he had in mind no such performance as the *Système*. Twenty years of such "cerebral hygiene" as Comte prescribed for himself would have upset a more firmly balanced mind than his. Total abstinence from all reading, except in the works of such men as Dante, Thomas à Kempis and St. Augustine, was not calculated to help in building up such a system of positive education as Comte intended. A mind so receptive as his would be more likely to try to incorporate these mediæval ideas with its own system of thought. This is exactly what Comte did. His passion for Madame de Vaux, a devoted mystic, carried him still further from his original design. So instead of a practical appeal for social reorganization, imaginatively based on scientific faith, the *Système* is a shadow of mediæval mysticism without its substance. It is the product of conscious self-illusion.

* Mill, "Auguste Comte and Positivism."

† In his marriage contract. See Littré.

‡ See in this connection, Watson, "Comte, Mill and Spencer," New York, 1894; Roberty, "*Auguste Comte et Herbert Spencer*," Paris, 1895.

Comte had promised a system of education which was to be imaginative, but was never to depart from scientific truth. By free universal education of this kind he meant to widen social sympathy and foster altruism. Whether he realized that his philosophic basis had proved insufficient, or that altruism was unattainable through scientific means, it is impossible to discover. In the general wreck he clung to enough of his past thought to prevent him from becoming a believer in theology; so all that was left him was to return to the miserable foolery of the Saint-Simonian school, from which he had separated in 1824. Yet in 1829 he had written to his friend, Eichthal (who was about to take the same step), that, rather than become a Saint-Simonian, it would be far better to return to the Catholic Church. *

Comte did not accomplish what he promised. Even had he retained all his faculties it is not probable that he could have built on his plans a system that would show any consistency. The same fundamental contradiction stood in his way from the beginning to the end. But if he ever had the ability it was destroyed by his insanity; for his later works fail so deplorably, and are filled with so many contradictions of his original design, that one is sometimes tempted to apply to him his own contemptuous description of Saint-Simon.

"He was a mere writer, and that a vague and superficial one. He only differed from other literary men in being less lettered than they, though in want of scientific instruction he was quite on a level with them. Of original creation he was always incapable. Even his mistakes he stole from other people's brains."†

The law of three states combined a psychological fallacy with a historical fallacy, and threatened to build on them an intellectual despotism. The classification of the sciences was a Procrustean bed which would have been fatal to scientific development. From such a starting-point it would

* "*Lettres à M. d'Eichthal*," in Littré, "*Auguste Comte et la philosophie positive*,"
† "System of Positive Polity," Vol. iii. Preface.

have been impossible for any one to create a science of sociology.

Comte is not to be compared with Aristotle or Bacon. His nearest parallel in history is Paracelsus. Each foresaw the birth of a new science, and attempted to stand sponsor for it in its infancy. And each was soon left far behind by the progress of the science; so that to-day little remains to either, except some historical importance and a name.

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